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Former CIA 'chief spook' Turner discusses secrecy

Stansfield Turner was bearing up pretty well, considering his day in the Twin Cities had started with a 6:30 a.m. interview on a national television show. Then he did a couple of public appearances and gave a speech at the Minnesota Press Club, where his lunch never showed up.

He was trying to simultaneously eat a club sandwich and answer questions when we talked in his hotel suite in mid-afternoon. Still ahead of him was an interview on a seven-city satellite hookup.

Turner, a retired admiral, served as director of

Central Intelligence from 1977 to 1981 when Jimmy Carter was president.

He was here Tuesday to talk about his new book, "Secrecy and Democracy: The CIA in Transition" (Houghton Mifflin,



MARY ANN GROSSMANN
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\$16.95). But the book almost got lost in the national and local media clamor to have Turner discuss the Walker spy cases, which involved Navy men, and the hijacking of the TWA airliner, a story that was unfolding in the Middle East the day he was in town.

So our interview focused on the book, which is based on his experiences in the Central Intelligence Agency. Its theme, Turner says, "is the inherent conflict that will always be difficult to balance between the need for secrecy in a democracy and the danger of overdoing secrecy."

The book is partly reminiscences, partly a look at how the sprawling intelligence community works and partly a look at political pressures on the director. Weaving it together are Turner's thoughts on how gathering of intelligence has changed and what must be done in the future to keep strong what he calls "the most effective intelligence agency in the world."

"I wrote the book for the American public, but clearly for those who are informed about national security affairs," Turner said. "It's not a spy novel; I hope to get to people who help influence the executive branch and legislators."

Turner was an outsider when he took over as what he calls "chief spook" at the CIA. His credentials were impressive.

A 1946 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, Turner won a Rhodes scholarship and earned a master's degree in philosophy, politics and economics at Oxford University.

For a year, he worked for Admiral Elmo "Bud" Zumwalt, who shook up the Navy with modernization and changes. Zumwalt put Turner in charge of the Navy's office of systems analysis and called Turner his "resident s.o.b." and his devil's advocate. Then Turner was named president of the Naval War College.

A commissioned officer in the Navy after graduation from Annapolis, Turner was made a full admiral in 1975. His last naval assignment was commander-in-chief of NATO's Southern Flank, based in Naples, Italy.

When President Carter asked his Annapolis classmate to take over at the CIA, America's intelligence community was in turmoil.

Turner tells in the book about how, starting in late 1974, "the American and foreign press and television were full of stories of intelligence misdeeds."

These included opening of private telegrams by the National Security Agency, placing "dangerous" citizens under surveillance, extensive use of citizens as informants, scanning tax returns for information about citizens, Army infiltration of dissident groups and plots to kill foreign political leaders.

It was Turner's job as the new intelligence director to put the past to rest and get on with running an agency that has three functions — espionage, technological surveillance and analysis.

The agency was also going through what Turner calls two "revolutions."

One revolution came about when Congress was given new powers to oversee the work of the intelligence community after its abuses hit the press.

Turner believes in congressional oversight, which he says the Reagan administration is now trying to dismantle.

"With oversight we have the benefit of input from the Congress that represents you and me," he said. "The Reagan administration treats Congress with disdain."

The second intelligence-gathering revolution was the explosion of technology.

"Technology collects far more data than we can sift or absorb," Turner said. "This has changed the way we use human spies. You don't risk human lives to get information you can get with technology."

But one of his problems was that the human spies — espionage agents — were the dominant people within the CIA when he took over. They were the glamour folks, and Turner spent much time trying to shift emphasis away from the James Bond stuff promoted by the media and toward technology and analysis.